

## NORTH HILL

## Walk North Hill Sanctuary June 29

By DAVID CLAPP, Director of Mass.  
Audubon Society's South Shore Sanctuaries

Those of you who live in Duxbury may have had the occasion to walk at North Hill. This generic name refers to about 1,000 acres of forest and water owned by many municipal departments and private non-profit organizations. The pine woods and feeling of remoteness make one think of Maine, the warm shallow pond with pond lilies in the summer looks like a southern lake, and the dry oak woods look like the sandy soiled forests of Plymouth. It is a wilderness and haven for people and wildlife. It harbors and protects the best drinking water resource in Duxbury.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society received ownership of the property in the early 1970s when Joe Lund sought us out to be the recipient of the land that he, Wellington Wells Jr., Edmund Kelly Jr. and Stewart Woodworth Jr. bought almost 50 years earlier to serve as their private hunting preserve. In the mid-1920s, Lund had been looking for more than 25 acres of wetland (flooded land so that it could be privately managed without meeting the access requirements of a great pond) within commuting distance of Boston, with ducks. When he found this spot along West (Malachi) Brook in the North Hill section of Duxbury, he bought it.

There was a family living on the land and they were asked to leave. Soon after, the house burned down and

the insurance windfall that followed secured the deed in a time when the depression made cash hard to come by. The white pine grove on the south end of the pond remains "insurance point" to those who know the story. The equally appropriate name of "Cathedral" has been applied to this area by those with a more romantic train of thought.

Once the men had paid for the land, they developed it for gunning. The time and money required of the endeavor made the cost of the few ducks they harvested quite dear. They built a dam and later allowed the adjacent cranberry bog farmer to build a 2nd dam that further flooded the valley of the West Brook.

Today, the pond is a place rich with plants: pond lilies, bladderworts, and a range of submerged vegetation. The pond bottom is jack-strawed with fallen trees and other remnants from the inundations suffered during the early flooding. A cedar swamp was flooded and many of the dead spires persist today, a half-century later.

The shore is terraced with vegetative zones that lay out the soils and elevations for the observer. Red maples mark the wet soils and areas where the water nearly reaches the surface of the ground. Stripes of white pine lead from the wetland edge to the oak woodlands of the sandy soils.

The colony of 100 pairs of tree swallows that use the boxes we put up is part of the summer scene. Usually 400 to 500 youngsters fledge from these wooden nurseries, yearly. Other birds found in the area include, great-crested flycatchers, osprey, eastern phoebes, and wood ducks.

I like North Hill because it is a big woods. It hums with life as insects eat plants and plants produce poisons

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to keep the insects away; as small mammals tunnel and probe among the 3-dimensional mat of roots that intertwine and share heaven-knows-what in the first 12 inches of earth; and as birds move from pine to pine gleaning the area.

The North Hill Sanctuary and abutting land form a greenbelt in the center of Duxbury. It is a place that serves wildlife and the public, and contributes to the well-being of all who wander its needle-covered trails.

### Take A Nature Walk

Learn more about the history and protection of North Hill Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary on Sunday, June 29, when Joe Grady, Duxbury's conservation administrator, leads a walk on the property from 2-4. Meet at the Mayflower St. parking lot.